

“Life Is Good”

by Dick Blide

I had moved to Dallas the year before, 1975, and was working at the Cooper Clinic practicing Preventive Medicine. One of my new activities was long distance running, up to marathon distances, 26.2 miles. The Aerobic Fitness Center, conveniently, was adjacent to the Cooper Clinic. Running had become more popular at this time and I made many new friends here who were runners.

I had finished seeing my patients for the day and had gone for a short run. On returning to the clinic I was walking by the swimming pool. I saw this beautiful woman just sitting down on a pool chair, dripping wet, having obviously just gotten out of the water. She was wearing a light green, black polka dot bikini. I walked by and went back into the clinic. I immediately sought out our secretary, Vicki, and asked her who was this woman. She looked out the window and said, “Oh, that’s Patti Price. Would you like to meet her?” I said, “yes,” and we went back to the pool. Vicki introduced us and we spoke briefly. She was very nice. I can’t remember what we said, but I was smitten.

After that, I noticed that Patti would often come and swim most days at the same time. A week later I waited outside the locker room for her to come out. When she did, I asked if she would like to get a cup of coffee. We had a small cafeteria in the Aerobics Center. She was very nice, but informed me that she had to go home as her son would be waiting for her. I was disappointed but vowed to try again which I did about a week later. I got exactly the same answer. Now, I wasn’t sure whether she was just not interested in me or she really felt the need to get home to her son. On both occasions she was very nice and I didn’t get the feeling that she was just putting me off.

So, I figured I should change my approach. I also thought, “Three strikes and you’re out,” so I better make the next time good. The Dallas White Rock Marathon was coming up and they always had a supper of salad and spaghetti the night before the race. Patti was a runner too. So, for the third time I waited for Patti to come out of the locker room. I asked if she would like to go to the supper with me. She said yes. “Whew!” It worked and I was so relieved. During the meal, I learned that Patti was married but was going through a divorce which I, also, was doing at the time. She also had a boyfriend, a cardiologist, who worked at the clinic and whom I had met; however, he was returning to his original home in Boston shortly to start a practice there. While driving Patti home after the supper. I asked if she would like to go out to dinner after the marathon the next day. I was running in it but Patti wasn’t this year. Again, she said yes. Now I was on a high.

I don’t remember much about the race. I probably ran it in the 3:20s. I had just started running long distance in September and this was my fourth marathon in six months. The main thing that I recall from the dinner after the marathon is that, when I asked Patti if she would like a drink, she said she didn’t drink. So, I said that perhaps we could share a Margarita? She agreed. When the Margarita came, it had two small straws in it. So,

we both sipped with our heads virtually touching and looking into each other's eyes. Patti later said that, as she looked into my light blue eyes, she became smitten too.

Patti and I were now dating. Her other boyfriend, Dave, had returned to Boston. She was going up to see him in April to talk over their relationship and decide whether she would continue dating me or solidify her relationship with Dave. As it turned out, I would be running the Boston Marathon at the same time. Patti said that she and Dave would be out there and watch for me. They would be watching from the top of "Heartbreak Hill." Can you believe that?

A group of about eight of us from Dallas were running the Boston Marathon. The weather was horrible – it was 97 degrees at the beginning and it dropped down to 87 degrees by the end. Back in those days there were no water stations along the route. However, the many people along the way provided water and drinks and even hosing.

Heartbreak Hill was at about 18 miles out. I was really dragging by this time because of the heat. At the top of the hill I saw Patti and Dave. They waved vigorously and had big smiles. I waved back and my heart sank. I could only think that I had lost out to Dave. I finished the race, pretty bedraggled and feeling crestfallen. I went out that night to celebrate but felt nothing.

I ran 3:28 which I thought was pretty good considering the conditions. Later, the marathon committee re-evaluated the times, and using data from their many previous marathon outings, recalculated our times to what they might have been under their usual conditions. They let me know that my corrected time would have been 3:06. That's pretty good. My goal was to eventually break 3:00 hours. I never did but that's another story.

On returning to Dallas my first date with Patti was to find out the result of her meeting with Dave. She indicated that she was having a get-together in Washington soon with her siblings and they were going to discuss her situation. So much for being smitten.

I wasn't happy but I wasn't going to give up either. The siblings held their reunion, and afterwards Patti told me that they had voted on whom she should pick to continue dating. I won! But I felt that there didn't appear to be much emotion involved in this decision-making. I asked Patti how each of her siblings had voted but she wouldn't tell me.

A lot was happening this Spring of 1976. I had been asked by Rainier Mountaineering to be the speaker on altitude sickness at their annual ice climbing school on Mount Rainier in July. I would be participating in the school including summiting Mount Rainier. I asked Patti if she would like to go on this trip with me. She said she had no clothes for this adventure, so I said we can take care of that which we did. Mount Rainier is a separate, exciting but sad story by itself. Suffice it to say that we had a great ice climbing experience until I incurred a severe injury that affected my life for many years to come.

That summer our relationship was progressing nicely to the point that we began talking about marriage. Both of our divorces had gone through in the spring. On December 18, 1976 we were married in a small ceremony which took place in the living room of Patti's home in Dallas and was attended by her father and her son Alexander. Afterwards, we

had a nice reception at a local hotel. The next day we flew to New Smyrna Beach in Florida for our honeymoon.

Patti had a wonderful passion. She loved teaching and even as a child she knew that this was her calling. After graduating from Rice University, she began teaching at the 3rd grade level. She then moved upward finally becoming a reading teacher at Lake Highlands High School in Dallas.



She also became a mentor for a student film club. They won a state-wide high school contest for a film they did in their first year. One of her students, John Sims, later wrote a screen play and produced the movie *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*, which was up for the inaugural Academy Award for Best Animated Feature of 2001, ultimately losing to *Shrek*. The club stayed together and at their 30-year reunion they invited Patti and me to attend their function. You could see that they still adored her.

Patti taught for 38 years. The last five years were as an administrator at Estacado High School in Lubbock, Texas where we had moved in 1990. Patti's greatest honor among other honors as a teacher was being chosen "Teacher of the Year" in 1990 while still in Dallas.

Patti's athletic prowess was shown by her winning many 1st place medals as a competitive swimmer in her youth. Then as an adult she took up distance running in her mid-thirties. She won the Dallas White Rock Marathon in 1975 and 1st place for women over 40 in the Galveston Marathon in 1976. She came in 19th in the Boston Marathon in 1975 with a time of 3:19. She matched that time twice more in her career. In the '90s she developed degenerative arthritis in both knees which eventually resulted in total knee replacements bilaterally which were very successful. She was never to run again, but we have enjoyed many years of wonderful walks.

After I retired in 1999, we moved to Pagosa Springs, Colorado. We had bought a vacation home there in 1994 which we used for skiing in the winter and hiking in the summer. A year later, in 2000, we sold this home and bought a larger one on a ridge overlooking ranch land and forest for 20 miles to the mountains. Here, we hiked with our Outdoor club just about every weekend and in the winter we either downhill or cross-country skied, usually in the Wolf Creek Ski area. Patti loved cross-country skiing, especially when we had our brown lab, Ghirardelli, to run with us.

I kept busy during this time working as a physician on the San Juan Health District Board. The health care in the area was abominable. Jim Knoll, another retired

physician, and I gathered together a group of like-minded citizens. At the next election we were able to replace the entire board with our own people. We then paid off a large debt in the ensuing year. I then suggested that we build a hospital which resulted in a lot of guffaws. However, I was able to obtain seed money to hire a consultant to research this idea. The end result was obtaining the funds to build a hospital, the first one in the area. This medical facility has been very successful and it now has developed into a medical center which is a real boon to the area.

In 2003 Patti had some vaginal bleeding. Checking with her Gynecologist this turned out to be uterine cancer. We got an appointment shortly thereafter at MD Anderson Cancer Hospital in Houston. Within days Patti had a total hysterectomy from which she recovered rapidly. Then, six months later at a routine checkup the cancer had recurred in the vagina. We returned to MD Anderson where Patti was to undergo an extended period of radiation.

But now another problem arose. Before going to Houston, we went snowshoeing with our Outdoor Club on Lookout Mountain which was in the Wolf Creek area of Colorado. There were about ten of us. As we started out, I became very short of breath. I rested and then started out again with the same result. I knew something was terribly wrong. Patti and I returned home. I contacted my physician who referred me to a cardiologist. He heard a loud heart murmur in the Mitral area indicating that I had Mitral regurgitation. He did an Echocardiogram which revealed severe regurgitation. This caused my shortness of breath and I needed a surgical repair.

We decided that Patti's cancer should be treated first. But then an almost miracle occurred. At MD Anderson we told Patti's Gynecologist of our plight. She said that her husband was a cardiologist and he worked right next door at the Texas Heart Institute. She talked to her husband that night and the next day I had an appointment with Dr. David Ott, a cardiac surgeon. Believe it or not, I had open heart surgery two days later to repair a Myxomatous Degeneration of my Mitral Valve. This was very fortunate since Patti was just starting her radiation. During the later stages of her radiation she would develop symptoms such as diarrhea and cramps but by then I was sufficiently recovered to be able to help her. So, this worked out very well. We were back home again in a little over a month and both feeling well.

Unfortunately for me it turned out that I had another heart problem that prevented me from recovering entirely. I had a Dilated Cardiomyopathy, cause unknown, which has slowly progressed over the years. I mention this because I still had some shortness of breath. So, while the hospital plans were progressing, Patti and I sought a lower altitude to relieve my breathing problem. We moved to Kalama, Washington and bought a beautiful home overlooking the Columbia River. But our sojourn here was to be short-lived.

In 2007 I noticed that Patti was having trouble with her memory. I feared that she might have Alzheimer's Disease. I didn't say anything to her as I didn't think that anything could be done for it and I didn't want to scare her. Then, because of my breathing problem it seemed wise to get a smaller home. We looked around for a year and then decided to move into a senior living facility, Mountain Meadows, in Ashland Oregon.

We were fortunate again as this was perfect for us. Here we had the Shakespeare Theaters which we attended every month and we had a beautiful place to walk along Ashland creek which was full of small rapids. A gift was to see Wood Ducks cavorting along the rapids and in an adjacent pond.

We now had a neurologist see Patti about her memory. He confirmed that she did have Alzheimer's and he placed her on two medications. I couldn't see that they made a noticeable difference. However, the disease appeared to be progressing very slowly. Thank God for small blessings.

I now had another worry. I was six years older than Patti and my heart disease was steadily getting worse. I began to worry about what would happen to Patti if I should die. The immediate answer was to be with family. Patti's brother Mike lived in Albuquerque and he and Patti were quite close. I talked to Mike about our situation and he agreed that it might be best for us to move to Albuquerque.



We made the move. We bought a very nice, small condo in the Four Hills area where Mike and his wife Bonnie lived just a mile away. Since we presumed this would be our last home, we spared no expense to make it and the patio very beautiful. This has worked out very well. Mike and Bonnie are our bosom friends. We see them often and go out for a meal or two together every week.

Patti still has her wonderful personality. Her memory is quite poor now but she can

still read and we converse well though with strangers it's more difficult. Physically she is quite well, better than me. Patti is now 83 and I will be 90 in a few months.

We have discussed our life together. We both agree it has been wonderful. For me it is far better than what I had expected. Patti says that her whole life has been wonderful. We agree that having great respect for each other has contributed to the strong feelings we have for each other. As Patti always says, “Life is good.”

Every night now, after we go to bed, the last thing I say to Patti is:

*Good night my beautiful Wiffie¹
I love you very much.
Sleep well,
I'll see you in the morning.*



¹ “Wiffie” has been my nickname for Patti for many years